

The Weaned Child

Octavius Winslow

“Surely I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child”

—PSALM 131:2.



here are few lessons taught in God's school more difficult to learn, and yet, when really learned, more blessed and holy, than the lesson of *weanedness*. The heart resembles the vine, which as it grows, grasps and unites its feeble tendrils to every support within its reach.

Or, it is like the ivy, which climbs and wraps itself around some beautiful but decayed and crumbling ruin. As our social affections develop and expand, they naturally seek a resting-place. Travelling, as it were, beyond themselves, breathing love and yearning for friendship, they go forth seeking some kindred spirit, some “second self,” upon which they may repose, and around which they may entwine. To detach from this inordinate, idolatrous clinging to the animate and the inanimate creatures and objects of sense, is one grand end of God's disciplinary dealings with us in the present life. The discovery which we make, in the process of his dealings, of the insufficiency and insecurity of the things upon which we set our affections, is often acutely painful. Like that vine, we find that we grasped a support at the root of which the cankerworm was secretly feeding,—and presently it fell! Or, like that ivy, we discover that we have been spreading our

The Weaned Child

affections around an object which, even while we clung to and adored it, was crumbling and falling into dust,—and presently it became a ruin! And what is the grand lesson which, by this process, God would teach us? The lesson of *weanedness* from all and everything of an earthly and a created nature. Thus was David instructed, and this was the result: “Surely I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child.” It may be profitable, tried and suffering reader, briefly to contemplate this holy state, and then the way by which the Lord frequently brings his people into its experience.

Every true believer, whatever may be the degree of his grace, is an adopted child of God. It is not the amount of his faith, nor the closeness of his resemblance to the family, that constitutes his relationship; it is the act of adoption by which his heavenly Father has made him his own. If he can only lisp his Father’s name, or bears but a single feature of likeness to the Divine image, he is as much and as really a child of God as those in whose souls the lineaments are deeply and broadly drawn, and who, with an unflinching faith, can cry, “Abba, Father!” Doubtless there were many of feeble faith, of limited experience and of defective knowledge—mere babes in Christ—in the church to which the apostle inscribed his letter; and yet, addressing them all, he says, “Behold, what manner of love that we should be called the sons of God.” But it is the character of the *weaned* child we are now to contemplate. All believers are children, but are all believers *weaned* children? From what is the child of God thus weaned?

The first object from which our heavenly Father weans his child, is—*himself*. Of all idols, this he finds the hardest to abandon. When man in paradise aspired to be as God, God was dethroned from his soul, and the creature became as a deity to itself. From that moment, the idolatry of self has

The Weaned Child

been the great and universal crime of our race, and will continue to be until Christ comes to restore all things. In the soul of the regenerate, divine grace has done much to dethrone this idol, and to reinstate God. The work, however, is but partially accomplished. The dishonored and rejected rival is loath to relinquish his throne, and yield to the supreme control and sway of another. There is much yet to be achieved before this still indwelling and unconquered foe lays down his weapons in entire subjection to the will and the authority of that Saviour whose throne and rights he has usurped. Thus, much still lingers in the heart which the Spirit has renewed and inhabits, of self-esteem, self-confidence, self-seeking, and self-love. From all this, our Father seeks to wean us. From our own wisdom, which is but folly; from our own strength, which is but weakness; from our own wills, which are often as an uncurbed steed; from our own ways, which are crooked; from our own hearts, which are deceitful; from our own judgments, which are dark; from our own ends, which are narrow and selfish, he would wean and detach us, that our souls may get more and more back to their original centre of repose—God himself. In view of this mournful exhibition of fallen and corrupt self, how necessary the discipline of our heavenly Father that extorts from us the Psalmist's language: "Surely I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother." *Self* did seem to be our mother—the fruitful parent of so much in our plans and aims and spirit that was dishonoring to our God. From this he would gently and tenderly, but effectually, wean us, that we may learn to rely upon his wisdom, to repose in his strength, to consult his honor, and to seek his glory and smile supremely and alone. And O how effectually is this blessed state attained when God, by setting us aside in the season of solitude and sorrow, teaches us that he can do without us. We, perhaps,

The Weaned Child

thought that our rank, or our talents, or our influence, or our very presence were essential to the advancement of his cause, and that some parts of it could not proceed without us! The Lord knew otherwise. And so he laid his hand upon us, and withdrew us from the scene of our labors, and duties, and engagements, and ambition, that he might hide pride from our hearts—the pride of self-importance. And O, is it no mighty attainment in the Christian life to be thus weaned from ourselves? Beloved, it forms the root of all other blessings. The moment we learn to cease from ourselves—from our own wisdom, and power, and importance—the Lord appears and takes us up. Then his wisdom is displayed, and his power is put forth, and his glory is developed, and his great name gets to itself all the praise. It was not until God had placed Moses in the cleft of the rock that his glory passed by. Moses must be hid, that God might be all.

Our heavenly Father would also wean us *from this poor, perishing world*. In a preceding chapter we touched upon the great snare which the world presented to the child of God. It is true Christ has taken him out of, and separated him from, the world; assailed by all its evils, and exposed to all its corrupting influences. The intercessory prayer of our Lord seems to imply this: “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil.” And O what an evil does the Christian find this world to be! In consequence of the earthward tendency of his affections, and the deep carnality with which the mind is imbued, things which God designed as blessings to soothe and soften and cheer, become, by their absorbing and idolatrous influence, powerful snares. Rank is a snare, wealth is a snare, talent is a snare, friendship is a snare. Rank may foster pride and ambition; wealth may increase the thirst for worldly show; talent

The Weaned Child

may inspire a love of human applause; and friendship may wean the heart from Christ, and betray us into a base and unholy compromise of Christian profession. Now from this endangering world our heavenly Father would shield, by withdrawing us. It is not our rest, and he agitates it; it is not our portion, and he embitters it; it is not our friend, and he sometimes arms it with a sword. It changes, it disappoints, it wounds; and then, thankful to expand our wings, we take another and a bolder flight above it. Ah! beloved, how truly may the Lord be now sickening thine heart to the world, to which that heart has too long and too closely clung. It has been thy peculiar snare; thy Father saw it, and wisely and graciously laid his loving, gentle hand upon thee, and led thee away from it, that from a bed of sickness, or from a chamber of grief, or from some position of painful vicissitude, thou mightest see its sinfulness, learn its hollowness, and return as a wanderer to thy Father's bosom, exclaiming with David, "My soul is even as a *weaned* child."

This weanedness, of which we speak, often involves *the surrender of some endeared object of creature affection*. The human heart is naturally idolatrous. Its affections, as we have previously remarked, once supremely centered in God. But now, disjoined from him, they go in quest of other objects of attachment, and we love and worship the creature rather than the Creator. The circle which our affections traverse may not indeed be a large one; there are perchance but few to whom we fully surrender our heart; nay, so circumscribed may the circle be, that *one* object alone shall attract, absorb, and concentrate in itself our entire and undivided love—that one object to us as a universe of beings, and all others comparatively indifferent and insipid. Who cannot see that in a case like this, the danger is imminent of transforming the heart—Christ's own sanctuary—into an idol's temple, where the crea-

The Weaned Child

ture is loved and revered and served more than he who gave it? But from all idolatry our God will cleanse us, and from all our idols Christ will wean us. The Lord is jealous, with a holy jealousy, of our love. Poor as our affection is, he asks its supreme surrender. That he requires our love at the expense of all creature attachment, the Bible nowhere intimates. He created our affections, and he it is who provides for their proper and pleasant indulgence. There is not a single precept or command in the Scriptures that forbids their exercise, or that discourages their intensity. Husbands are exhorted to “love their wives, even as Christ loved his church.” Parents are to cherish a like affection towards their children, and children are bound to render back a filial love not less intense to their parents. And we are to “love our neighbors as ourselves.” Nor does the word of God furnish examples of Christian friendship less interested and devoted. One of the choicest and tenderest blessings with which God can enrich us, next to himself, is such a friend as Paul had in Epaphroditus, a “brother and companion in labor, and fellow-soldier;” and such an affectionate friendship as John, the loving disciple, cherished for his well beloved Gaius, whom he loved in the truth, and to whom, in the season of his sickness, he thus touchingly poured out his heart’s affectionate sympathy: “Beloved I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.” Count such a friend, and such friendship amongst God’s sweetest and holiest bestowments. The blessings of which it may be to you the sanctifying channel, are immense. The tender sympathy—the jealous watchfulness—the confidential repose—the faithful admonition—above all, the intercessory prayer, connected with Christian friendship, may be placed in the inventory of our most inestimable and precious blessings. It is not therefore the use, but the abuse, of our

The Weaned Child

affections—not their legitimate exercise, but their idolatrous tendency—over which we have need to exercise the greatest vigilance. It is not our love to the creature against which God contends, but it is in not allowing our love to himself to subordinate all other love. We may love the creature, but we may not love the creature more than the Creator. When the Giver is lost sight of and forgotten in the gift, then comes the painful process of weaning! When the heart burns its incense before some human shrine, and the cloud as it ascends veils from the eye the beauty and the excellence of Jesus,—then comes the painful process of weaning! When the absorbing claims and the engrossing attentions of some loved one are placed in competition and are allowed to clash with the claims of God, and the attentions due from us personally to his cause and truth,—then comes the painful process of weaning! When creature devotion deadens our heart to the Lord, lessens our interest in his cause, congeals our zeal and love and liberality, detaches us from the public means of grace, withdraws from the closet, and from the Bible, and from the communion of the saints, thus superinducing leanness of soul, and robbing God of his glory,—then comes the painful process of weaning! Christ will be the first in our affections—God will be supreme in our service—and his kingdom and righteousness must take precedence of all other things. In this light, beloved, read the present mournful page in your history. The noble oak that stood so firm and stately at thy side, is smitten,—the tender and beautiful vine that wound itself around thee, is fallen,—the lowly and delicate flower that lay upon thy bosom, is withered—the olive branches that clustered around thy table, are removed—and the “strong staff is broken and the beautiful rod;” not because thy God did not love thee, but because he desired thine heart. He saw that heart ensnared and enslaved by a too fond and idola-

The Weaned Child

trous affection,—he saw his beauty eclipsed and himself rivalled by a faint and imperfect copy of his own image, and he breathed upon it, and it withered away! “The day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon all . . . *pleasant pictures*.” When an eminent artist, who had concentrated all the powers of his genius upon a painting of our Lord celebrating the last supper, observed that the holy vessels arranged in the foreground were admired to the exclusion of the chief object of the picture, he seized his brush and dashed them from the canvass, and left the image of Jesus standing in its own solitary and unrivalled beauty. Thus deals our God oftentimes with us. O solemn words! “The day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon all PLEASANT PICTURES,”—all pictures that veil and eclipse the beauties of him who is the “brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of his person,” God will obliterate.

Filial submission to God’s will, is, perhaps, one of the most essential features in this holy state of weanedness of which we speak. “Surely I have *behaved* and *quieted* myself as a child that is weaned of his mother.” There are some beautiful examples of this in God’s word. “And Aaron held his peace.” Since God was “sanctified and glorified,” terrible as was the judgment, the holy priest mourned not at the way, nor complained of its severity, patient and resigned to the will of God. He “behaved and quieted himself as a child that is weaned of his mother.” Thus, too, was it with Eli, when passing under the heavy hand of God: “It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good.” He bowed in deep submission to the will of his God. Job could exclaim, as the last sad tidings brimmed his cup of woe, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” And David was “dumb and opened not his mouth, because God did it.” But how do all these instances of filial and holy submission

The Weaned Child

to the Divine will—beautiful and touching as they are—fade before the illustrious example of our adorable and blessed Lord: “O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, *thy will be done.*” Ah! how did Jesus, in the deepest depth of his unutterable sorrow, “behave and quiet himself as a child that is weaned of his mother? his soul was even as a weaned child.” Such, beloved, be the posture of thy soul at this moment. “Be still.” Rest in thy Father’s hands, calm and tranquil, quiet and submissive, weaned from all but himself. O the blessedness of so reposing!

“Sweet to lie passive in his hands,
And know no will but his.”

“*God’s love!*” It is written upon your dark cloud—it breathes from the lips of your bleeding wound—it is reflected in every fragment of your ruined treasure—it is pencilled upon every leaf of your blighted flower—“GOD IS LOVE.” Adversity may have impoverished you—bereavement may have saddened you—calamity may have crushed you—sickness may have laid you low—but, “GOD IS LOVE.” Gently falls the rod in its heaviest stroke—tenderly pierces the sword in its deepest thrust—smilingly bends the cloud in its darkest hues—for, “GOD IS LOVE.” Does the infant, weaned from its wonted and pleasant fount, cease from its restlessness and sorrow reposing calmly and meekly upon its mother’s arms?—so let thy soul calmly, submissively rest in God. How sweet the music which then will breathe from thy lips in the midnight of grief: “Surely I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child.”

And who can bring you into this holy position? The Holy Spirit alone can. It is his office to lead you to Jesus—to reveal to you Jesus—to exhibit to your eye the cross of Jesus—to

The Weaned Child

pour into your heart the grace and love and sympathy of Jesus—to bend your will and bow your heart to the government of Jesus, and thus make you as a weaned child. The work infinitely transcends a power merely human. It is the office and the prerogative of the Divine Spirit—the “Spirit of holiness”—who only can sever between flesh and spirit, to bring you into the condition of one whose will in all things is completely merged in God’s. And what is his grand instrument of effecting this? *The cross of Christ!* Ah! this is it. THE CROSS OF CHRIST! Not the cross as it appeared to the imagination of the Mahomedan Chief, leading the imperial army to battle and to conquest; not the cross pictured—the cross engraved—the cross carved—the cross embroidered—the cross embossed upon the prayer-book, pendant from the maiden’s neck, glittering on the cathedral’s spire, and springing from its altar: not the cross as blended with a religion of Gothic architecture, and painted windows, and flaming candles, and waving incense, and gorgeous pictures, and melting music, and fluttering surplices: O no! but the cross—the naked, rugged cross—which Calvary reared, which Paul preached, and of which he wrote, “God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which* the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” Faith, picturing to its view this cross, the Holy Spirit engraving it on the heart in spiritual regeneration, the whole soul receiving him whom it lifts up, as its “wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption,” gently and effectually transforms the spirit, that was chafened and restless, into the “meekness and gentleness of Christ.” O what calmness steals over his ruffled soul! O what peace flows into his troubled heart! O what sunshine bathes in its bright beams, his dark spirit, who from the scenes of his conflict and his sorrow, flees beneath the shadow and the shelter of the cross. The

The Weaned Child

storm ceases—the deluge of his grief subsides—the Spirit, dove-like, brings the message of hope and love—the soul, tempest-tossed, rests on the green mount, and one unbounded spring clothes and encircles the landscape with its verdure and its beauty. Child, chastened by the Father’s love, look to the cross of your crucified Saviour. And as you fix upon it your believing, ardent, adoring gaze, exclaim—

“Wearily for me thou soughtest,
On the cross my soul thou boughtest;
Lose not all for which thou wroughtest.”

What is thy sorrow compared with Christ’s? What is thy grief gauged by the Lord’s? Thy Master has passed before thee, flinging the curse and the sin from thy path, paving it with promises, carpeting it with love, and fencing it around with the hedge of his divine perfections. Press onward, then, resisting thy foe resolutely, bearing thy cross patiently, drinking thy cup submissively, and learning, while sitting at the Saviour’s feet, or leaning upon his bosom, to be like him, “meek and lowly in heart.” Then, indeed, shall “I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child.”

* “Whereby” See versions of Tyndal, Cranmer, and Geneva, as collated in Bagster’s English Hexapla.



The Weaned Child

“Quiet, Lord, my froward heart,
Make me teachable and mild,
Upright, simple, free from art;
Make me as a weaned child.
From distrust and envy free,
Pleased with all that pleases Thee.

“What Thou shalt today provide,
Let me as a child receive;
What tomorrow may betide,
Calmly to Thy wisdom leave.
’Tis enough that Thou wilt care,
Why should I the burden heart.

“As a little child relies
On a care beyond its own;
Knows he’s neither strong nor wise—
Fears to stir a step alone—
Let me thus with Thee abide,
As my Father, Guard, and Guide.

“Thus preserved from Satan’s wiles,
Safe from dangers, free from fears,
May I live upon thy smiles
Till the promised hour appears;
When the sons of God shall prove
All their Father’s boundless love.”